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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001189

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: INTERNATIONAL COMPACT FOR IRAQ/EXPANDED NEIGHBORS
MEETINGS: IRAQ REACHES AGREEMENT THAT EGYPT WILL HOST BOTH
EVENTS

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Following the Ambassador's intervention with Prime Minister Maliki late afternoon April 4, the Iraqis quickly finalized their internal agreement to pursue back-to-back conferences for the International Compact for Iraq (ICI) and Expanded Neighbors meeting, preferably in Egypt. Subsequently, Foreign Minister Zebari obtained Egyptian agreement to host these events during an April 4 conversation with his counterpart Egyptian FM Ahmed Aboul Gheit. The Prime Minister's Chief of Staff told the DCM April 5 that Prime Minister Maliki had also spoken to the Egyptian Prime Minister and that they agreed that the ICI would be May 2, followed by the Expanded Neighbors Conference on May 3. (Note: Zebari told A/DCM April 6 that he and Aboul Gheit have since agreed on May 3-4.) Zebari also stated on April 6 that he and Aboul Gheit agreed to a joint announcement of the conferences on April 7; he said he would seek to include a reference to a possible follow on in Turkey. The Egyptians also reportedly welcomed a visit from Prime Minister Maliki to Egypt before the conference.

¶2. (C) Summary continued: Between April 4-6, Zebari has spoken with the Turks, the Iranians, the Syrians, and the Egyptians (several times). The Turks were upset, and Zebari would appreciate U.S. help with them. The Iranian FM needed to consult with his government before providing a substantive response on the arrangements. The Syrians said they had pledged their support to the Turks. In related conversations with the DCM, the Prime Minister's office also stated that they would welcome the U.S. sending an envoy to regional capitals in advance of the conferences to assure that the outcome of the events meets Iraqi needs. The Prime Minister explained to the Ambassador his deep concerns that some regional parties will attempt to use the conference to interfere in internal Iraqi affairs or to "impose a solution." The Ambassador re-pledged to Maliki full U.S. support to assure a positive outcome, including agreement in advance of the conference on the elements of a communique. End Summary.

Ambassador's Meeting with the Prime Minister

¶4. (C) The Ambassador called on Prime Minister Maliki April 4 to persuade him of the need to take a prompt decision on scheduling the ICI and Expanded Neighbors Conference, back-to-back, in one regional location, preferably in April. Maliki seemed prepared for the topic to be raised. He expressed his thanks to the Ambassador for President Bush's evident concern and support during the recent VTC. He said he wanted the conferences to be successful and he understood that they were important not only to Iraq but also to the United States. He expressed surprise that Kuwait was not willing to host both events, but he was prepared to re-raise the issue with the Political Council for National Security

(PCNS) that was meeting again later that day. He said he would prefer to delay a decision until his return from his upcoming Asia trip (Japan and Korean) and perhaps after his planned regional travel to Egypt, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia (no dates mentioned). Perhaps the two meetings could be held separately and be delayed somewhat allowing the Iraqis to visit most capitals in advance of the meeting. He acknowledged regional problems, particularly being in a "negative position" vis-a-vis the Saudis. He also expressed concern again about some states using the conference to "surprise" Iraq with participation by opposition elements, and possible repercussions if the Sunni coalition, Tawafuq, should withdraw from the National Unity Government before the conferences. He sought the Ambassador's views.

15. (C) The Ambassador acknowledged the complexity of the regional situation, but stressed that the Secretary and he both strongly believed that the best outcome would derive from holding the two events together, in a regional capital. The ICI obviously held special importance due to the Iraq-UN partnership and its focus on the economy. The Expanded Neighbors Conference could reinforce the ICI as well as allow better engagement with Iraq's neighbors on a number of issues. The Prime Minister pondered whether or not the Saudis would participate. Stating that the money issues were not important to Iraq, he nevertheless commented about Saudi demand for interest on interest-free loans to Saddam that did not even benefit the Iraqi people. Maliki said that improved political and security support from his neighbors was his highest priority for the conferences. He then repeated at length his need for guarantees prior to the conferences that the outcomes will support the Iraqi political process with no surprises or "explosions." He said the Russian position was not always helpful, the French were getting better. He

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identified Iran, Turkey, Egypt, Syria, and Saudi Arabia as countries of greatest concern to him. If they support Iraq, he was not concerned about the rest. The Ambassador told the Prime Minister that the U.S. was fully ready to help on guarantees and serve as an intermediary wherever such a role would help. He stated that the U.S. goals for the conferences were 100% consistent with the goals the Prime Minister had articulated. But he urged a quick decision. The Prime Minister said he would be traveling April 7-16 to Asia, and then again when returned. He undertook to raise the issue with the PCNS that evening and get the Ambassador a response quickly.

Getting the Egyptians to Host

16. (C) The DCM learned later the evening of the 4th that the PCNS had approved holding the meetings back to back, the ICI first, followed by the Expanded Neighbors Conference. Cairo was the first choice, but if the Egyptians could not do it, then Istanbul would be acceptable to the Iraqis. Later still, Foreign Minister Zebari reported that he had spoken to his counterpart FM Aboul Gheit and that the Egyptians had agreed to do both between May 2-4 and they would welcome a visit from PM Maliki before the conference. On the morning of April 5, Maliki's Chief of Staff told the DCM that Maliki had spoken to the Egyptian Prime Minister to confirm details. They had agreed on May 2-3, later revised to May 3-4. The Prime Minister's office also stated that the Iraqis would welcome having a U.S. envoy visit regional capitals in advance of the meeting to assure the meetings are prepared in a manner that will support Iraqi goals. Zebari reported as well that he and the Egyptian FM had agreed that no public announcement would be made until consultations with other regional capitals had been completed.

Consultations Beginning

17. (C) Zebari spoke with FM Gul April 5 and reported to the DCM that Gul was "really upset" and asked if the Iraqi decision reflected a lack of trust in the Turks. Zebari assured him that Iraq's decision stemmed from understandings reached at previous meetings of the neighbors in Tehran and New York that favored an Egyptian venue. Zebari said he would welcome U.S. efforts to assuage the Turks. Zebari also spoke to the Iranians, the Syrians, and to the Egyptians again. He said he congratulated Mottaki on the return of the Iranian diplomat who had been kidnapped in Iraq as well as their wise handling of the British release. Zebari explained the planned arrangements for the conferences and urged Iranian active participation. Mottaki said he would have to consult his government before providing a response. In an April 6 phone call to the Syrians, they Syrians said they had already heard from the Turks who were very upset, putting the Syrians in a difficult position since they had pledged their support to holding the conference in Turkey. Zebari told A/DCM that he would see if he could note in the announcement that a follow on event could be held in Turkey.

18. (C) At one point, Aboul Gheit told Zebari that the Egyptians wanted the Expanded Neighbors Conference to precede the I.C.I. (exactly opposite Maliki's stated position) and that they would not fund the costs of the ICI. However, Zebari said that by April 6, Aboul Gheit agreed that the ICI. would be the first event.

Action Requests

19. (C) We recommend that S/I include several stops in advance of the conference, to at least include: Moscow, Cairo, Istanbul, and Riyadh. Mission will work with FM Zebari to propose inviting additional participants to the Expanded Neighbors conference, to include the EU, Australia, Korea, and Poland.
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